

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 5, 2008

BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL SOUTHERN SKYLINE BOULEVARD EXTENSION

File No. 08-035-01
Project Manager: Lisa Ames/Carol Arnold

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to provide up to \$185,000 to the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission to prepare detailed plans, engineering designs and environmental documents for the Southern Skyline Boulevard Extension of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, San Mateo County.

LOCATION: Peninsula Watershed, Upper Crystal Springs Reservoir, from Highway 92 south on the east side of Upper Skyline Blvd. (Highway 35) for 4.7 miles to the boundary of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area's Phleger Estate, within San Mateo County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Regional Trail Map](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Photographs of Project Site](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Letters of Support](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred eighty-five thousand dollars (\$185,000) to the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission to prepare detailed plans, engineering designs and environmental documents for the Southern Skyline Boulevard Extension of the Bay Area Ridge Trail in San Mateo County. Prior to the commencement of work and the disbursement of funds, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy, a detailed work program, schedule and budget and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, Chapter 4.5 (Sections 31160-31165) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This project will result in the San Francisco Public Utility Commission’s (SFPUC) developing detailed plans, engineering designs and environmental documents for the Southern Skyline Boulevard Trail (Skyline Trail), a segment of the planned 550+ mile Bay Area Ridge Trail (Ridge Trail). This 4.7 mile trail will traverse ridge lands east of Highway 35 within the hydrological watershed of the Upper Crystal Springs Reservoir in San Mateo County which is owned and managed by the City and County of San Francisco for water supply purposes. The Skyline Trail will be managed by the SFPUC and will be open to hikers, bicyclists and equestrians. A portion of the trail may be wheelchair accessible.

For many years, most of the Peninsula Watershed (Watershed) was off-limits to hikers, bicyclists and equestrians due to the City and County of San Francisco’s (City) use of the area for water collection and storage. In 1978, in cooperation with the City, San Mateo County opened a six mile stretch of lowlands adjacent to the fenced Crystal Springs reservoirs for public access. Known as the Sawyer Camp Trail (aka Crystal Springs Trail), this is one of the most popular trails in the County. The interior of the Watershed remained closed to public use until August 2003 when the SFPUC opened the ten-mile Fifield-Cahill Ridge Trail (Fifield Trail) which extends from Sweeney Ridge in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) south to Skylawn Quarry at Highway 92. To protect the area from erosion and other negative impacts, the SFPUC uses a reservation system to limit the number of visitors and requires docent accompaniment.

The SFPUC has now decided to construct the Skyline Trail in order to extend the Ridge Trail through the southern portion of Watershed ridge lands. Unlike the Fifield Trail, the Skyline Trail will not require reservations or accompaniment by docents. The design will take advantage of particular topographical features to minimize negative impacts to biological resources and water quality. The trail will be open every day during daylight hours.

Together, these trails will provide an approximately fifteen-mile segment of Ridge Trail through interior Watershed lands, leading to GGNRA lands on both the north and south ends. Visitors will be able to hike, bike, or ride their horses through stands of pristine old growth Douglas fir, evergreen hardwood woodlands and fragrant coastal scrub while enjoying expansive vistas of Watershed lands, Mt. Diablo, San Francisco Bay, the northern spine of the Santa Cruz Mountains, Mt. Tamalpais, the Marin Headlands and the Pacific Ocean. Plans are underway to link the Skyline Trail to nearby open space areas managed by the National Park Service, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District and the County of San Mateo (Exhibit 2).

The SFPUC has been actively engaged in trail planning in this region for many years, and has successfully completed the above-mentioned Fifi Field Trail. In planning for trails and other related issues, the agency works closely with many agencies and organizations, including the County of San Mateo, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, GGNRA and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council.

Site Description: Located in the heart of the San Francisco Peninsula, Peninsula Watershed is comprised of approximately 23,000 acres of some of the most pristine lands remaining in the San Francisco Bay region. For many years utilized by the SFPUC for water supply purposes, drainage is captured by reservoirs lying within the rift zone of San Andreas Valley created by action of the San Andreas Fault. San Andreas Valley, the two reservoirs lying within it and the coastal mountains above are highly scenic landscape features very familiar to residents and visitors traveling the north/south corridor of Interstate 280.

The eastern boundary of the Watershed overlays Interstate 280 for several miles, extends west across San Andreas Valley, then climbs the 1,700 foot ridgeline. West of the ridgeline, thousands of acres of park and preserved open space lands abut Watershed lands, making the region one of the largest and most undeveloped landscapes in the San Francisco Bay area. For miles, dense forests of oak woodland, cypress and Douglas fir give way to open grasslands and chaparral, offering the visitor a rare glimpse of a largely undisturbed California coastal mountain ecosystem (Exhibit 3).

Biologists have identified over 165 species of birds, 800 species of plants and trees, 50 species of mammals, and 30 species of reptiles and amphibians on Watershed lands. In fact, the Watershed contains the highest concentration of rare, threatened, and endangered species in the nine-county Bay Area and is a State Fish and Game Refuge. Four endangered butterflies inhabit the region, as does the endangered San Francisco garter snake and the threatened California red legged frog. The area is also host to a number of rare plants. Visitors frequently spot deer, squirrels, bobcats, coyotes and rattlesnakes, and occasionally, mountain lions on Watershed lands.

Project History: Prior to the arrival of European settlers, lands within the Watershed were long inhabited by Shalshone Indians, one of the tribes of the Costanonan group. Early European settlers farmed the Watershed area now known as San Andreas Valley, the rift valley created by movements of the San Andreas Fault lying beneath it.

During the Gold Rush, the then small town of San Francisco thirteen miles to the north was growing into a booming city, creating a demand for a reliable water source to supply its burgeoning population. The Spring Valley Water Company, forerunner to the SFPUC, bought up farms in San Andreas Valley and Pilarcitos Creek watersheds and beginning in 1860 constructed dams and reservoirs to capture local runoff. Eventually, City water officials realized a larger water supply was needed and looked to the Sierra Nevada Mountains for a source. Plans for the controversial Hetch Hetchy water system were developed, which resulted in the damming of the Tuolumne River in the 1920's and the diversion of water to the San Francisco Bay Area.

In addition to using the Crystal Springs reservoirs to store local runoff, the City used them to store some of the very pure water transported via the Hetch Hetchy system from the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Fear of contamination of this pure water led the City to impose severe restrictions on land uses in the Watershed. Public access was limited to a small public road

adjacent to the fenced reservoirs. In 1978, the County of San Mateo closed the road to vehicles and opened the Sawyer Camp Trail (aka Crystal Springs Trail) to recreational users. Over the years, the six-mile Sawyer Camp Trail has become one of the most popular trails in the County.

Due to fears of erosion and other disturbances that could impact water quality, the City continued to prohibit public access to the interior areas of the Watershed. Finally, following completion of the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan, the City allowed construction of segments of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

The vision for the Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 500-mile multi-use, continuous trail that rings San Francisco Bay, high on the ridgeline. Under the leadership of the Conservancy and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (BARTC), and supported by a diverse group of project partners, the Ridge Trail creates an interconnected system of open space and trails that provides recreational opportunities and scenic views to the public. Begun almost 20 years ago, over 300 miles of trail are now dedicated and/or open to the public in all nine Bay Area counties.

In 2003, the SFPUC constructed a ten-mile section of the Bay Area Ridge Trail known as the Fifield Trail. As part of the \$625,000 project, the Conservancy provided \$125,000 in funding for public access improvements, including the purchase and installation of restrooms for the staging area and along the trail. The trail begins near Highway 92 and extends northward to the Watershed boundary where it connects with the GGNRA's trail system, including the Sweeney Ridge segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. The Fifield Trail is open to the public but in order to minimize negative impacts, reservations are required and docents must accompany visitors. Following the opening of the Fifield Trail, the SFPUC began planning the southern extension of the Ridge Trail through Watershed lands.

This authorization will further the Conservancy's statutory and strategic goals of improving access around San Francisco Bay, and is consistent with previous Conservancy authorizations to negotiate and acquire trail easements, prepare trail construction plans and designs, and construct and open trail segments to the public. The proposed Skyline Trail, the subject of this recommendation, will extend for 4.7 miles from Highway 92 south to the GGNRA's Phleger Estate, creating a fifteen-mile segment of Ridge Trail.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Conservancy	\$185,000
SFPUC	<u>207,500</u>
Total Project Cost	\$392,500

The Conservancy's contribution of \$185,000 is expected to come from its FY 2007/2008 appropriation of the California Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). These funds may be used for the development of land resources in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project serves to assist in the development of land-based public access by completing plans, engineering designs and environmental documents for the construction of a 4.7 mile segment of the Bay Area Ridge

Trail, consistent with Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation as described below. Proposition 84 also requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects with matching funds (Public Resources Code Section 5096.651 and 75071). The SFPUC will contribute over \$200,000 toward the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31165, to address resource goals in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The property is located in San Mateo County, one of the nine San Francisco Bay Area counties in which the Conservancy is authorized to undertake projects and award grants to address resource and recreational goals for the region (Sections 31160-31161).

Pursuant to Section 31162(a), the Conservancy may award grants to improve public access through completion and operation of regional bay, coast, and ridge trail systems while preserving local natural resource areas. The proposed project will result in the completion of plans, engineering designs and environmental documents for the Skyline Trail, a 4.7 mile segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail in the Crystal Springs Watershed area of San Mateo County.

Section 31163 provides criteria for eligible projects under the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. Projects should have local support, serve a regional constituency, be timely, include matching funds, and take advantage of otherwise fleeting opportunities to benefit the region. The proposed project is consistent with Section 31163(c) in the following respects:

- (1) Supported by local and regional plans: The project is supported by the *Peninsula Watershed Management Plan* adopted by the SFPUC on June 26, 2001. This Plan recommends various management actions to protect water resources and habitats within the Watershed, as well as to provide passive recreational opportunities, including trail alignments in the ridge lands. Consistent with this plan, the Skyline Trail will provide opportunities for hikers, bicyclists and equestrians to enjoy the outstanding scenic resources of this area while protecting natural resources.
- (2) Serves a regional constituency: The project serves a regional constituency, in that it will provide a segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail for the benefit of the population of the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. The Sawyer Camp Trail in the lower watershed is one of the most popular in the County and is visited by hikers and bicyclists from all over the region. The Fifield Trail in the ridge lands is also very popular with visitors throughout the region. The Skyline Trail will add another trail segment to the Watershed, further opening the ridge lands, which have long been off-limits.
- (3) Timely implementation: The SFPUC has been engaged in a long planning process for the Skyline Trail and is ready to move ahead with final plans, engineering designs and environmental documents.
- (4) Opportunity for benefits provided by project: The project provides benefits that would be lost if the project is not quickly implemented. All parties are ready to move ahead and conceptual plans are in place.
- (5) Use of matching funds: The SFPUC is providing over \$200,000 of matching funds.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective 11E** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, which seeks to develop 50 miles of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, the proposed project will result in final plans, engineering designs and environmental documents for a 4.7-mile segment of the Ridge Trail. It has been developed in consultation with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, and will be partially funded by the SFPUC.

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective 11L** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, which aims to include wheelchair accessible or other ADA-compliant elements in 25 Conservancy-funded projects, the proposed project will include an ADA-accessible trail segment if a feasible staging area can be identified through the planning and engineering process.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The proposed Skyline Trail has broad public support and is endorsed by Senator Leland Yee, Assemblyman Gene Mullin, Assemblyman Ira Ruskin and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is in San Mateo County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** Although the SFPUC is contributing over \$200,000 to complete the planning, design and environmental review phase of this project, it is not sufficient to cover all costs. Without the Conservancy's contribution of \$185,000, the project would not move forward.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** There has long been an interest among government officials, environmental groups and recreational users in San Francisco and San Mateo Counties to open portions of the Crystal Springs Watershed to public use. The effort to do so is now underway, having begun in the 1970's with the Sawyer Camp Trail in the lowlands, and then in 2003 with the opening of the Fifiield Trail in the northern portion of the ridge lands. The Skyline Trail will complete this effort by adding an additional 4.7 miles of trail south of the Fifiield Trail. Trails opened to date have experienced enormous popularity, taking visitors through some of the most scenic and undisturbed lands in the Bay region. Due to the

outstanding outdoor experience offered by this trail system, visitors come from all parts of the Bay region and beyond for hiking, bicycling and horseback riding.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The SFPUC has engaged in an extensive planning process to move forward with recommendations in the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan, adopted by that agency in June, 2001, to open portions of the Crystal Springs Watershed to public use. In order to progress to the next phase – completion of final plans, design and environmental documents for the Skyline Trail – Conservancy funding is urgently needed or the momentum that has been generated by participating entities over the years will cease to move forward.
8. **Leverage:** In addition to hours of staff time already devoted to this effort, the SFPUC has identified over \$200,000 of its own funds that it will use toward this project. The Bay Area Ridge Council has also contributed substantial in-kind services to this project.
9. **Readiness:** If approved, the SFPUC is ready to proceed with the final plans and engineering designs, which will be followed by the preparation of environmental documents. The agency anticipates this phase of the project will take at least two years, at which time it will move into the construction phase.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Conservancy has been engaged in several projects to complete the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Among these are acquisitions of the Dutra Ranch in Contra Costa County, the Skiles Property in Sonoma County, and the Neville Property in Santa Clara County. The Conservancy has also provided funds to the Bay Area Ridge Council to promote, coordinate and plan for the proposed 550+ mile Ridge Trail throughout the Bay Area.
11. **Cooperation:** The project involves extensive cooperation between the SFPUC, San Mateo County, the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, the Department of Fish and Game, National Park Service, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District and recreational and environmental groups. The agency has long experience engaging in this type of collaborative effort, having in recent years completed its Peninsula Watershed Management Plan and related programmatic environmental documents.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

This project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15262 (“Feasibility and Planning Studies”) because it involves only feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions and will not have a legally binding effect on whether the Skyline Trail is constructed.

Part of the project consists of basic data collection and resource evaluation activities, including those necessary for planning the trail alignment. These information-collecting activities will be designed and implemented in a manner that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource and are thus categorically exempt from CEQA review, under CCR Section 15306 (“Information Collection”).

Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the project.